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2. THE FAMILY

Two basic types of family were to be found in Ruanda: the nuclear family which was the most widespread, and the polygynous family. The Ruanda polygynous family constituted a type of organization fundamentally different from the nuclear family. It was not just a nuclear family with a few more persons, the secondary wives and their children, but a structure composed of several elements, each of them constituting almost a nuclear family from the sexual, economic, procreational, and educational points of view. On the other hand, the polygynous family was not an aggregate of nuclear families because the uniqueness of the husband gave to the various elements a type of integration different from that merely of a sum of nuclear families.

A nuclear family (*rugo*) was composed of a man, his wife, and their children. It could happen that some additional persons lived with them, such as the widowed mother of one of the spouses or an old female relative (old men usually lived by themselves, with the help of a grandson). There could also be a child, a son, or a daughter of the husband's brother or even of the husband's sister (if the bride-wealth had not been given for his sister), or a child of the wife's brother.

Adopted children were also included in the rugo. These could only be children who had no lineage relatives left. Tutsi children, when adopted by Tutsi, were treated, while they were young, as if they were the adopter's own children; Hutu children if adopted by Tutsi were considered as clients. But adoption did not confer the full status enjoyed by an offspring of the adopter: the ward could marry a descendant of his foster-father. Cases of adoption seem to have been frequent and people appear to have been so eager to adopt that we may suspect that all the advantages were not for the child. The Ruanda highly appreciated all children, and this attitude accounts for the fact that a child was as such always welcomed in a family. Moreover, the man adopting a child expected more material advantages: a girl's marriage brought him the benefit of a new family connexion and boys could be as useful as his sons without having a right to inheritance. Our informants say that most of the boys when grown up fled away, hoping to find some distant relative of their own.

The members of a nuclear family lived in a compound called

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The members of a nuclear family lived in a compound called
594 by the same name, rugo. I have described earlier this complex dwelling place composed of intersecting circular enclosures. In
[592] the case of rich people, their clients during their time of service
[554] and their servants had huts in the compound.

The compound, surrounded by fields and banana-groves, and not far from pastures, was situated on that part of the paternal homestead given by the father to his son at the latter's wedding. If the father's homestead was not large enough to provide all his sons with areas to live on, the young couple either had to ask the political authority to allocate them a plot, or they had to rent one belonging either to a relative or an unrelated person.

595 The ideal type of residence of a polygynous family was a compound for each wife surrounded by its own cultivated area. These rugo could be on the same homestead or on several homesteads. The latter arrangement was more frequent with Tutsi than with Hutu. None of these compounds was more important than the others, except occasionally. The husband had no rugo regarded as being more his residence than the others.

Between these two sharply different types of family organization, there were intermediate kinds. If it happened that a Ruanda wanted a second wife, he looked for one even if he could not afford a second compound. She lived then in the same compound as the first wife, in a separate hut. But such an arrangement was regarded as unfortunate, and should be assimilated to that of a nuclear family notwithstanding the plurality of wives.

121 We will now consider whether and how these types of organization fulfilled the functions that might be expected of any type of family, for some of these functions seem to be fulfilled by all the family structures known, and the others by most of them. The points to be considered are: sexual gratification, economic cooperation, reproduction, socialization, and ritual.

(a) *Sexual relations*

581 The Ruanda distinguish the sexual from the procreational function of marriage. Neither the husband, nor apparently the wife, ever feared (except in very unhappy circumstances of poverty) that pregnancy might result from any particular act of
[842] intercourse; on the contrary such an event was usually longed for. As some informants said, why have relations with a sterile woman? Sexuality, however, had for them a value in itself.

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were growing, when a child had his hair cut in tufts for the first time, at the initiation into the Ryangombe sect, when a daughter was asked to marry, on the wedding day of a son or a daughter, on the accession of a new king, at sowing time, and at the celebration for July harvesting. All these events were happy and joyful because they were growths or increases in life. Intercourse was also obligatory at the end of the mourning periods when life had to go on and start again after that period of abeyance.

This obligatory intercourse took place between husband and wife. When it was impossible because one of the spouses was absent or dead, one had to rely upon a privileged partner, or, if this was impossible, had to get medicine prepared from certain herbs by a diviner.

There was no prohibition of intercourse between the spouses during the suckling months (the first eighteen to twenty-four).

(*b*) *Economic co-operation*

The nuclear family and, to a large extent each wife's compound in polygamous cases, was a self-sufficient unit of economic co-operation. Among rich Tutsi who could afford separate homesteads for their wives, each wife was in fact the superintendent of her own. She had to command her husband's clients, servants, cultivators, and herdsmen. It was no wonder that women who could be entrusted with such responsibilities were respected within their family and in society at large. If the homestead was small, as among ordinary Tutsi, or consisted only of a small cultivated plot, as among most Hutu polygamists, each of these wives had, nevertheless, some economic responsibility, even if it was only that of working by herself in the fields. This important participation of polygynous wives in the management of a small unit of production and consumption, should be studied in relation to the status of women in Ruanda.[9] This status was by no means equal to that of men but it was far from being one of slavery. Tutsi husbands and wives ate together, the wife was consulted by her husband on many problems, and she was treated with much politeness. The Hutu were ruder and more temperamental, but they followed a more or less similar pattern. Under the present administration there are two or three women, widows of Tutsi chiefs, who act as sub-chiefs. The mere fact that it is taken for

[9] See Naigiziki, 1959.